

Cherrywood Homeowners Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 159

Olney, Maryland 20830

June 21, 2021

Dear Council President Hucker and Montgomery County Council,

It is incredibly disturbing that powerful elected and appointed officials would push forward the Thrive Montgomery 2050 plan during a pandemic while most residents are consumed with life and death worries related to covid-19, vaccinations, and employment. Thrive Montgomery is a distorted plan to rezone and permanently change the character of neighborhoods.

Most residents have been isolated at home over the last year and know very little about the sordid details of this plan especially in regard to radically changing our neighborhoods that have been developed over the past 50 years. With public gatherings substantially banned by the Government, there have been no opportunities for neighbors to meet to review details. The County should be required to run ads on the radio and in the newspaper to inform the public of this proposed plan and have in-person public meetings before moving it any further along.

There are a lot of things wrong with Thrive MoCo 2050. It took County Executive Marc Elrich 11 pages to go through all the flaws in this study process so it is, therefore, impossible to cover all these deficiencies in a two-minute summary. Please see the Executive's 6-10-21 letter to Council President Tom Hucker. First and foremost, what is the rush to complete this plan before we recover from covid-19 and the 2022 election cycle begins? The Executive lays out good reasons why he and most citizens object to moving this proposal forward at this time. We share his concerns. Among them:

- Lack of AHSI (Attainable Housing Strategies Initiative) transparency, notice, and ability to participate in the discussions (p2);
- Not robust attendance at virtual meetings (p2);
- HEAT (Housing Equity Advisory Team) members, including "developers and real estate professionals who may benefit from the changes in the zoning" had direct access to Staff for drafting zoning proposals (p3);
- HEAT members had access to proposals before the public creating a process that "favored developers and supporters of the rezoning." (p3).
- "The parallel courses of the General Plan and the AHSI are not only confusing but suggest a predetermined outcome before the public has even been able to offer testimony about the Thrive plan." (p3)

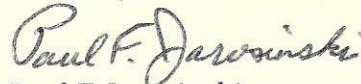
It is this last quote by the County Executive that is particularly disturbing; that is, that the whole process appears to have been rushed along to meet a "predetermined outcome." The process should start over with different people conducting the

process and “favored developers and real estate professionals” should be excluded from access to the data or Staff prior to the general public.

There are several other fatal flaws in this overdevelopment plan as the Executive points out. The planning staff’s assumption that “urbanism by itself is sufficient” is flawed. Staff have gone about this process for the entire County and made an assumption like they were developing a plan for an urbanized city and not an entire County. The other fatal flaw by the Planning Board is the assumption that a majority of people in their overdeveloped and overcrowded neighborhoods will use mass transit as their mode of transportation. Mass transit ridership in MoCo has been falling for more than 8 years having hit rock bottom in 2020. While there will be nominal increases in transit use because numbers can’t go any lower, transit is unlikely to ever return even to previous levels due to the covid-19 experience. The government has confirmed the significant health risk of mass transit through it’s current policy of requiring masks on mass transit while almost everywhere else a mask is not required. This indelible message will convince many that returning to mass transit is hazardous to your health and should be avoided.

In summary, as pointed out by the County Executive, the Thrive MoCo 2050 program is greatly flawed with extreme bias toward “favored developers and real estate professionals” with a “predetermined outcome.” Information to existing homeowners about the rezoning plans for their neighborhoods has been woefully inadequate. The Planning Board should heed the points of the County Executive and start over with a new, less-biased person leading the effort and include more public input all along the process. Lastly, community leaders are very concerned about the Council’s true willingness to hear their feedback on this proposal since the Council has restricted community testimony by closing the registration to testify a full 11 days before the Council hearing.

Sincerely,



Paul F. Jarosinski
President